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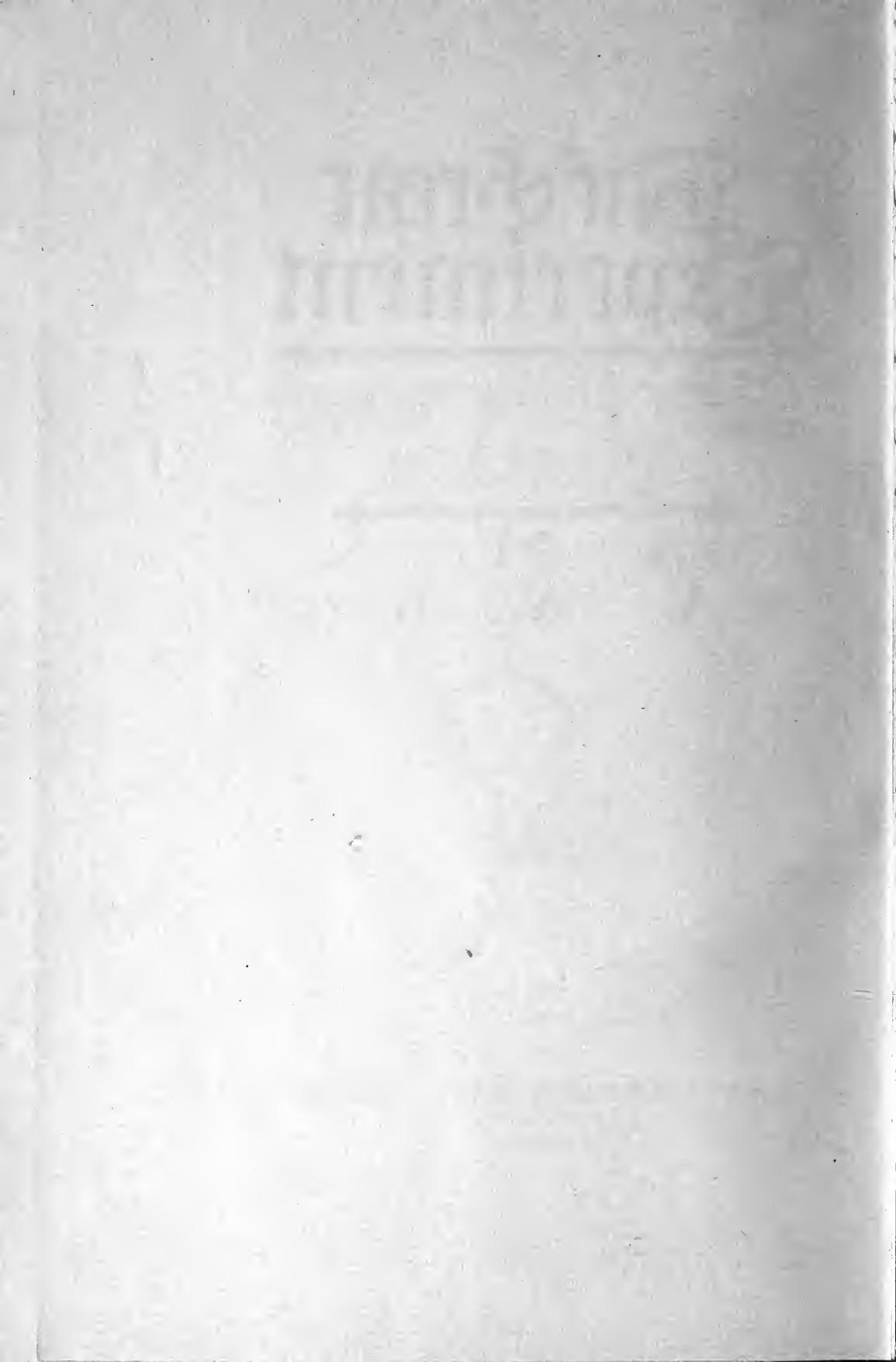
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# The Great Experiment A Shakespearean Fantasy

BY ANNA MORGAN  
AND ALICE WARD BAILEY







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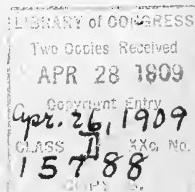
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G. J. of  
Wednesday 3rd Oct.  
Recd. A.M. 5 Nov. 21.

*"When in the chronicle of wasted time,  
We plead our guilt and take our share of blame,  
As those who risked or reasoning or rhyme,  
We'll say, "But Franklin Head—he did the same;  
'Twas he who found the route and fixed the gait;  
We learned of him to trifle with the great."*

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

HOSTESS.....	
ANNE HATHAWAY.....	of Shottery
CATHERINE.....	of Aragon
ANNE BOLEYN.....	of London
JANE SEYMOUR.....	of Gaultree Forest
ANNE.....	of Cleves
CATHERINE HOWARD.....	of Surrey
CATHERINE PARR.....	of Westminster
VOLUMNIA .....	of Rome
QUEEN GERTRUDE.....	of Elsinore
OPHELIA.....	of Elsinore
JULIET MONTAGUE, nee Capulet.....	of Verona
JULIET'S NURSE.....	also of Verona
MIRANDA.....	of the Isle of Sycorax
LADY MACBETH.....	of Inverness
CLEOPATRA.....	of Egypt
MRS. CALPHURNIA CAESAR.....	of Gaul
MRS. PORTIA CATO BRUTUS.....	of Capitoline Hill
MISTRESS FORD.....	of Windsor
MISTRESS PAGE.....	of Windsor
MAJORDOMO or Page.....	
BUTLER, who serves tea.....	





# THE GREAT EXPERIMENT

A SHAKESPEAREAN FANTASY

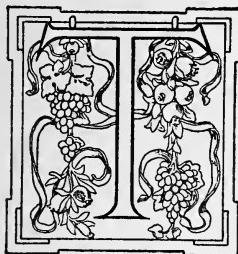
By

ANNA MORGAN AND ALICE WARD BAILEY

## SCENE

Living-room of Hostess. Walls hung in dull green. A bust of Shakespeare on a carved stand at back of stage, center. Antique carved chairs and table, with tea service, left. Carved settle to right.

HOSTESS:



HE TIME HAS COME TO MAKE  
THE GREAT EXPERIMENT.  
WERE SHAKESPEARE'S  
HEROINES ALIVE, AS CRIT-  
ICS SAY,  
REALITIES THAT ANSWERED  
EVERY TEST?  
OR WERE THEY PUPPETS ON  
THE STRING HE PULLED?

The pictured likeness of a face he saw;  
A shadow caught in passing; visions, dreams,  
Dissolved as soon as he who gave them form  
Ceased from the cunning operation of his skill?  
If once alive, then now, as I will prove;  
For missives sent into the Great Beyond  
Addressed to each by her own proper name  
Brought back these answers:

"I will come and will set forth the painful tale  
Of Wolsey's treachery and of the King's default."

(Signed) "Catherine of Aragon."

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Likewise did these, the other wives of Henry,  
Hamlet's mother, Cleopatra, Juliet, and others.  
Enter Majordomo, who presents card.

HOSTESS: (Surprised. Reads:)

Mrs. William Shakespeare! Can it be?  
She comes unsummoned, if indeed 'tis she.  
Enter Anne Hathaway.  
Anne curtseys. Hostess offers hand.

HOSTESS:

An unexpected pleasure. Surely doubt of your identity  
Never entered any heart.

ANNE H.:

Aye. No one argues if I did or did not live,  
Yet of my life make havoc as they will.  
Let it go—I come not for redress,  
But as a messenger, no more, no less,  
Unto thyself, since thou art bent  
On making here thy great experiment.  
Know it is Shakespeare's will that here, to-day,  
He shall be represented by Anne Hathaway.  
So rapt the Master in his work, he sends  
By me his love, and greetings to his friends,  
And bids the truth Godspeed, for ever has he sought  
The truth in all he wrote and taught.

Majordomo is heard at door talking  
with a number of women.

MAJORDOMO:

Nay, but you cannot all be the Queens of Henry VIII!  
What shall I say? First—second—third?

CATHERINE of Aragon (Interrupting):

Peace, fellow; hearken and be still. I was his first,  
Nor did renounce the name, nor will.

ANNE BOLEYN:

He renounced it for thee, and handed on to me.

ANNE of Cleves:

But to wrest from thee. What hast more than I?

## A SHAKESPEAREAN FANTASY

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CATHERINE HOWARD:

Or I?

CATHERINE PARR:

I was his last. None took from me the name of Queen.

JANE SEYMOUR:

No need; thou didst thyself bestow it on another king.

CATHERINE PARR:

After Henry was dead.

JANE SEYMOUR:

Unqueened ye were, ye five, by axe, or judge, or your own giving.

I was the lawfulest Queen, while I was living.

MAJORDOMO (To himself): I'll bunch 'em!

(Announces.) The six wives of Henry VIII!

The wives look daggers at him but summon all their dignity and sail into the room.

CATH. OF AR. (To Hostess):

Unnamed I come.

HOSTESS:

But not unrecognized,  
For dignity and pride of birth and piety  
Write plain your name, great Queen.

Hostess presents Cath. of Ar. to Anne H. They greet each other and draw apart in conversation. Hostess turns to Anne B., who says in an aside:

ANNE B.:

That was Catherine of Aragon whom you saluted by the title I should bear; myself am Anne, the Queen.

HOSTESS:

Yes? You are welcome, too.

JANE SEYMOUR (Frowning, as she looks at her companions):

I wot not why these came; they have no part in what was wrote.

## T H E   G R E A T   E X P E R I M E N T

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CATHERINE PARR:

No more hast thou.

ANNE OF CLEVES:

Many a time and oft  
Have I soothed Henry,  
Singing small ditties  
When he was o'erwrought  
And "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,"  
Like this: (SINGS.)

CATHERINE PARR:

I did divert him with grave discourse.

JANE SEYMOUR:

So 'tis said,  
And that thou nearly lost thereby thy head.  
What then? Did I not to him bear,  
Costing my life, a son, and England's heir?

HOSTESS:

As the children say, "Let's play you are all queens."  
Majordomo announces Mrs. Calphurnia Caesar, of Gaul, and Mrs. Portia Cato Brutus of Capitoline Hill.

MRS. CAESAR:

All queens, said you? Then 'tis no place for her  
Whose lord did thrice put by the crown they offered  
him.

MRS. BRUTUS:

Nor for the wife of him who dared prevent a fourth time  
of that offering.

MRS. CAESAR (Reproachfully):

Portia, did we not agree long since  
That bygones should be bygones twixt us twain?

MRS. BRUTUS:

That did we, and will hold thereto.

They are greeted by Hostess and  
Anne Hathaway. Majordomo announces Lady Macbeth.

## A SHAKESPEAREAN FANTASY

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LADY MACBETH:

"We coursed them at the heels,  
And had a purpose to be their purveyor."  
Who said that?

Lady, 'tis a wild night—the witches are all out!

CATH. HOW.:

How do you know there are such things as witches?  
Majordomo announces Miranda, the  
daughter of Prospero.

HOSTESS:

Here is the daughter of Prospero, she will know.  
Enter Miranda.

MIRANDA:

"How many goodly creatures are there here?  
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,  
That hath such people in 't!"

HOSTESS:

'Tis new to thee?

MIRANDA:

Aye, very.

CATH. HOW.:

How do you know there are such things as witches?

MIRANDA:

My father used to say,  
"Elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes and groves,"  
There were, and "those that in the sand with printless  
feet,  
Did chase the ebbing Neptune and did fly him  
When he came back."  
Dread Caliban, the monster of our isle,  
Had a witch mother, Sicorax.

HOSTESS:

Did you ever meet with these?

MIRANDA:

Never, except with Caliban  
I think mine eyes were held,  
Lest in perceiving I might be misled

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---

By curiosity or fear,  
To hold converse with them.  
Once I was very near to seeing.

HOSTESS:

Do tell us about it. Was it a real psychic experience?

MIRANDA:

You shall judge. I heard at morn and eve  
“Sounds and sweet airs that gave delight and hurt not.”  
Alone I was, and lonely—  
My father ever at his books  
Or plunged so deep in thought,  
I’d call him o’er and o’er again  
Before he roused to answer.  
So I loved my music,  
And from loving that,  
Loved him from whom it came.

HOSTESS:

Him? How knew you ’twas a man?

MIRANDA (Laughs in delight):

Wouldst thou not know?

HOSTESS (Laughs).

MIRANDA:

So did I come to love  
I knew not what or whom,  
And found strange pleasure in so doing.  
When first I saw Prince Ferdinand  
I thought my spirit lover  
Thus took shape to come and woo me.  
For a while I was in a strait betwixt the two,  
Now listening to the music’s soft beguiling,  
Now caught and held by a strong human hand.  
But soon the substance drove the shadow quite away.

HOSTESS:

A pretty tale, well told. Stay, who comes here,  
Stranger alike to confidence and fear?

Majordomo announces Volumnia, the  
mother of Coriolanus. Enter Volumnia. The Hostess greets her.

## A SHAKESPEAREAN FANTASY

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VOLUMNIA:

Rightly thou sayest; I who underwent  
Such pangs—my son's disgrace, his banishment—  
Nothing can harass or annoy,  
Nor is there aught on earth I can enjoy;  
But speak of Coriolanus, and I come—  
A mother's pride cannot be dumb.

Majordomo brings letters.

HOSTESS:

Regrets from Viola and Imogene! (Puzzled.)  
(Reads): They say they cannot find their clothes!  
What do they mean?

ANNE H.:

Let me explain.  
Each soul that doth go hence  
Doth leave behind its envelopes,  
Physical and magnetic. When it would return  
It must envelop itself in other robes  
Won from the magnetism of those who yet dwell on  
the earth.

HOSTESS:

Was it so with the others?

ANNE H.:

Aye, each hath been suited to appear  
In properest habiliments before you here.

HOSTESS (Looking curiously at the guests):

I wonder who fitted them out. Hamlin Garland will  
probably know who it was. He knows all about  
these things.

Majordomo announces Cleopatra of  
Egypt. He enters and looks around  
surprised.

MAJORDOMO (To Hostess):

I beg your pardon, Madam; she was here and gave me  
her name.

HOSTESS (To Anne H.):

Do you suppose that her magnetic envelope gave out?

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ANNE H. (Mysteriously):  
She is in a different case.

HOSTESS:  
I don't understand. Ah! here she comes!  
Enter Cleopatra. She salaams.

CLEOPATRA (Jauntily):  
I went back to tie up my air ship.  
Dost think 'tis worth thy while  
To charm "the serpent of old Nile?"

HOSTESS (Admiringly):  
I don't know about that. But I am quite sure "the serpent of old Nile" will charm me. You must have a lot of stories to tell. Give us one about Antony, for instance.

CLEOPATRA (Reflecting):  
I might tell that old fish story.

HOSTESS:  
Do.

CLEOPATRA (With gusto):  
When Antony was in Egypt, I took mine angle and he his, then to the river, my music playing far off. I did betray tawney-finned fishes. My bended hook did pierce their slimy jaws, and as I drew them up I thought them every one an Antony, and said, "Ah! ha! you're caught!" Twas merry when we wagered on our angling. Then my diver did hang a salt fish on Anthony's hook, which he with fervency drew up, as many a time he'd done the fish that he had bribed his diver to put on. Then did I laugh him out of patience, and laughed him in again, saying, "Great Roman, leave the fishing to us Egyptians—angle thou for kingdoms and for realms." (Applause.)

Majordomo brings in a message.

HOSTESS:  
A wireless from the Lady Olivia—she and Sebastian are studying along those lines—that shipwreck of his called forth interest. They are trying to connect with

## A SHAKESPEAREAN FANTASY

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Mars, and cannot leave. I do hope they will succeed.

Majordomo announces Gertrude of Elsinore, and her ward, Ophelia. Enter Gertrude. She is greeted by Hostess, and passes on, joining Volumnia.

**HOSTESS** (To Anne H.):

She seems like a very nice person. I do hope it isn't true about her husband being asleep after dinner in the garden and getting that stuff poured into his ear by his brother.

**GERTRUDE:**

Not a word, Madam, not a word is true.  
The spirit that did appear unto my son,  
Purporting to be the ghost of Hamlet's father, was but  
a lying apparition—  
Though, for that matter, 'twas a most jealous lord!  
"Would beteem the winds of heaven not to visit me too  
roughly."  
You know the sort of man—they are most exacting!  
Nay, he was even mistrustful of old Polonius,  
Whom I did hate, while loving his daughter—  
Where is she? Where is my ward, Ophelia?

Enter Ophelia.

**OPHELIA:**

Here I am; I went back for my flowers.  
All day I have been in the fields and gardens with the  
children,  
Gathering daisies and hazel twigs,  
Violets and the fragrant eglantine.

(Shows her basket.)

See, here are pinks and poppies, lavender and bright  
marigold,  
Iris and ivy and dear forget-me-nots,  
That are really "think-of-nothing-else's,"  
Wild roses and daffy-down-dillies and—heartsease.

**HOSTESS:**

What do you mean to do with them?

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OPHELIA:

I know not, lady. (Puts her hand to her head.)  
I meant them for some one—whom I cannot tell.  
Dear flowers, they were so glad to go with me.  
Perhaps they'll help me to remember, by and by, who  
'twas.

HOSTESS:

I think what she needs is young company.  
Majordomo announces Juliet Montague, nee Capulet, and her nurse.

NURSE:

She's like to find it in my lamb and me!  
The unweaned babe is not so young as—

JULIET:

As Juliet?  
I'll teach Ophelia to remember and forget—  
Remember how happy she hath been—will be again;  
Forget what she hath felt of grief and pain;  
To her most tragic joy I will apply  
The balm of my most joyous tragedy.

NURSE:

There she goes—mating words that were ne'er affianced.  
'Tis a worse matchmaker than ere was I.  
Majordomo brings in letters.

HOSTESS:

Regrets from Isabel, Hermione and Lady Anne. They  
are working with the suffragettes, and cannot be  
spared. I don't wonder they took up suffrage after  
their experience with men.

HOSTESS: Regrets from Desdemona, for whom Emilia  
writes. (Reads):

"My sweet mistress hath not in all these years  
Been healed of her hurt. It went so deep in her frail  
frame,  
And found her very soul. Of late she sleeps  
And he who hath her in his charge, said: 'This is well—  
None must waken her.'"

## A SHAKESPEAREAN FANTASY

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HOSTESS (In a disappointed tone):

She doesn't say a word about Othello.  
I hoped to hear what had become of him.

ANNE H.:

He, too, sleeps and must not be disturbed.

HOSTESS:

Sleeps? That villain!

ANNE H.:

Nay, mad-man, rather.

OPHELIA:

Mad-man, say you? let me go to him.  
My heart is sore for all the poor  
Demented folk that throng  
The other side and this. I would do  
Something for their cure—sing to them, soothe them,  
Brew quieting potions that shall make them sleep.  
I pray you, convey me to this poor mad-man,  
That I may work his cure.

GERTRUDE:

'Tis ever thus with those who are themselves dis-  
traught;  
They fancy others in that wretched plight—  
Only themselves are sane.

Majordomo brings in more letters.  
Hostess reads regrets from Portia.

HOSTESS:

Portia's regrets!  
"Fair Mistress, thou hast done me honor  
In thus bidding me to be present at thy feast,  
But on the day ordained I must be otherwhere.  
Certain seditious Jews have incited one Shylock  
(Late of Venice), who did in life  
Harass and trouble my husband and his friend, Antonio,  
To appeal unto the higher court; to reopen  
The case at law which hath been justly terminated long  
ago.  
Be it known to all who inquire: What they do most  
effect here they will persist in there,

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With more urgent endeavor and more fervent zeal.  
And there be those who do spur on the uneasy ones,  
Having themselves no business of their own  
Wherewith they may beguile the time.  
The case hath been called for April twenty-third,  
And I again do plead for Antonio, who was and is Bas-  
sanio's friend.  
As to the matters whereof you ask, to-wit: the true tale  
of all my happenings,  
I will straightway, when this appeal to the Supreme  
Court  
Hath finally been dealt with, prepare a paper to be read  
before your gracious council,  
Setting forth the actual events (hitherto somewhat en-  
larged from their true content).  
My greetings to those of your present world and to the  
members of our absent realm."

(Signed) Portia, late of Belmont,  
Wife of Bassanio.

### VOLUMNIA:

There be other cases should be tried again. My son,  
Caius Marcius, surnamed Coriolanus, was most un-  
justly dealt with.

### MRS. CAESAR:

My husband, too, so wrongfully condemned  
For crimes he never knew.

### MRS. BRUTUS:

Wrongfully, say'st thou?

### MRS. CAESAR:

Now! now! we have agreed not to debate that ancient  
quarrel. It is centuries since the Brutuses and Caes-  
ars were at peace.

Majordomo brings in more letters.

### HOSTESS:

Regrets from Constance. (Reads):  
"I have not much to tell more than the commentaries  
have rehearsed,

## A SHAKESPEAREAN FANTASY

---

But thus the wise physician, who hath healed so many,  
saith—my mind is sound.”

(Looks up from letter).  
Who is this wise physician?

LADY MACBETH:

“Can he minister to a mind diseased,  
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow”—(Stops abruptly).  
Where have I heard that before?

HOSTESS:

Poor, crazy thing—if she is crazy! I suppose the question of her sanity has never been settled.

ANNE H.:

Oh, yes, it has.

GERTRUDE:

(To Anne H.) Yes, indeed, tell her.

ANNE H.:

No, you tell her.

GERTRUDE:

(To Hostess.) The very first thing we did after going across, my husband and I—

CLEOPATRA:

(Suavely.) Which husband?

GERTRUDE:

Hamlet's father. I have no other husband now. On the other side we find our affinities, and that settles it, once and for all—though Claudius was lovable enow—much more affectionate than the King.

HOSTESS:

And could the King o'erlook the past?

GERTRUDE:

He, too, had sinned and suffered, and had learned thereby forgiveness to the sinner. We learn much on the other side.

The six wives nod in affirmation.

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GERTRUDE:

'Twas greatly exaggerated, as I said.  
We expiate our sins, but purged of dross, recast,  
We ring true metal, at the last.  
As I was saying, the first thing that we did—

HOSTESS:

Excuse me—just one more question, please—  
This matter of affinities—was any one of these Henry's  
affinity?

CATH. OF AR.:

Alas! we have none of us e'er met with Henry,  
Nor do we know where he is now.  
I fear he hath been sent Below!  
The other wives start.

LADY MACBETH:

"No more o' that! No more o' that! You mar all with  
this starting!"

HOSTESS:

(Pityingly.) Perchance if she could drink a cup of tea,  
'twould calm her nerves. (To Anne H.) Will you  
pour?

Mrs. Caesar, Mrs. Brutus, Volumnia and Lady Mac-  
beth gather around the tea table. Cleopatra wanders  
about the room—stands gazing at the bust of Shakes-  
peare.

GERTRUDE:

As I was saying, the first thing we did was to have  
expert testimony on our son Hamlet's sanity. The  
wisest doctor over there pronounced upon his case  
and declared him a victim of melancholia. A course  
of treatment he did then outline, and it has resulted  
in a cure.

Our poor, dear Ophelia we have not yet succeeded in  
bringing out of her distress. Time may do much for  
her. She had not the intellect my son Hamlet had,  
in the beginning, and these healing processes are  
slow.

## A SHAKESPEAREAN FANTASY

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MRS. CAESAR:

Caesar hath been greatly holpen of his falling sickness,  
by this same leech. Greatly did I fear during his life  
on earth that it would be his end.

CLEOPATRA:

You could not end a Roman thus! The sword must cut  
that knot, or let old age untie it.

VOLUMNIA:

My son, Caius Marcius Coriolanus, had twenty-five  
wounds upon the last expedition—none in 's back,  
praised be the gods! There was one in the shoulder,  
and one in the left arm—

LADY MACBETH (Starting up—upsetting her tea):

"Who would have thought the old man to have had so  
much blood in him!"

VOLUMNIA (Continuing):

He received in the repulse of Tarquin, seven hurts in  
the body, one in the neck and two in the thigh.

LADY MACBETH (Solemnly—subsiding into her seat):

"What's done cannot be undone!"

HOSTESS:

What does ail her, to act so after all these years?

GERTRUDE:

The doctor says she was obsessed by the spirit of Kenneth IV, her grandfather, who was killed fighting against Malcolm II, the grandfather of Duncan. Kenneth could not rest in 's grave till he had wiped the last descendant of Malcolm off the earth. The Thane of Cawdor, in his conversation with the witches, did greatly help on her condition.

ANNE H.:

There be various obsessions. Othello was obsessed by an idea. There are various degrees of insanity, too. With Lear, 'twas acute mania; with Hamlet and Jacques melancholia; with Timon of Athens, delusional insanity—the fixed idea. Caesar was an epi-

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leptic; the fools and jesters were said to be half-witted, but had more sense than those who thought they were whole witted.

CATH. OF AR.: (Frowning.)

All this is timeless and beside the mark.  
We were invited here that we might each relate  
The story of our life. Myself had much to tell  
Of Wolsey's treachery and the King's default.

CATH. HOWARD:

And I, also, who have not spoke ten words since we  
have entered here,  
Could strike the listener dumb with chronicles as yet  
unchronicled.  
The time may come when some historian shall tell what  
hath been left untold;  
Then say to those who marvel at his tale,  
Catherine Howard has been prompting him.

ANNE OF CLEVES:

While ye are doing, speak a word for Anne,  
Who hath been made to show  
An uncouth visage to the world.  
Come, now, look on me, and disclose  
If I am plain!

CATH. PARR:

Who cares? Long since thou laid aside  
Thy claim, thy title, and should add thy pride.

JANE SEYMOUR:

These meddling wives do break in twain  
The thread of discourse. (To Hostess.) Pray begin  
again.  
Majordomo enters with letter from Cordelia.

HOSTESS:

Regrets from Poor Cordelia! Domestic troubles prevent her coming, so she says. Her father's malady, no doubt. Was that obsession, too?

## A SHAKESPEAREAN FANTASY

---

ANNE H.:

(Promptly.) Nay, acute mania it was and is.

ANNE OF CLEVES: (In a loud whisper to Anne Boleyn.)  
I'll wager Henry was obsessed!

HOSTESS:

(In a low voice to Anne H.) Was he?

ANNE H.:

Only as all are by their choice, provoking contact with  
or right or wrong,  
These are their own fiends incarnate.  
Enter Majordomo with letter of Katherine.

HOSTESS:

Regrets from Baptista's daughter, Katherine, that was  
called "The Shrew." She has been slumming on the  
other side, finding in charitable work her greatest  
happiness. The invitation was delayed. It followed  
her about. She cannot come, but sendeth gracious  
messages to all.

ANNE H.:

Complete was her collapse from puffed-up naughtiness,  
before she went across. Some there be who go hence  
full-blown in their sins. (Looks at Cleopatra).

CLEO.:

Do you mean me?

ANNE H.:

Aye, you, Bright Wickedness! Nay, I will speak!  
(To the others.) The Egyptian was not of our number  
on the other side, but hovering just above the earth,  
caught up the message, ere it had been sent, and  
hither came. She hath never crossed, but flieth low,  
tempting wild maidens to their ruin, sowing discord be-  
twixt man and wife.

MRS. CAESAR:

She hath no chance here to work harm. Why doth she  
tarry?

MRS. BRUTUS:

Why, indeed?



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CLEO. (Tauntingly):

To call to mind that ye are all foolish, jealous wives.  
Mistress Shakespeare herself hath not forgot the dark  
lady of the sonnets, nor hath let her good man forget,  
either, I'll be bound!

ANNE H. (Courageously):

That is my story and it shall be told. I did fear the power of her, the unknown, unto whom my husband wrote, and when I learned that he held her to be his dream wife, who did inspire his thoughts—that I was but the drudge, the stay-at-home—bitter, indeed, I grew of heart. That hath been cleansed now of its malaise. Mine eyes have been unsealed, mine ears unstopped. Here on the earth I would have held him down to keep him by my side. There, he hath lifted me up unto himself, and I have learned his worth, have come to be trustworthy and to trust. Thinkest thou else he would have made of me his messenger?

CATH. OF AR.:

There spake the true wife, who deserves the love of him she calls her lord Bear witness (To the five other wives.) Ye who sought a throne and found death or dismay—not by that path is true love won. Rather would I tread a thousand times the thorny road I trod. 'Twill lead me, soon or late—bear witness, ye who thought to find another way—'twill lead me, soon or late, to Henry's heart.

Enter Majordomo with letter from Beatrice.

(Hostess says): A letter from Beatrice. What do you think she says? "Benedict and I are writing a series of problem plays, through George Bernard Shaw, on the question Is Marriage a Failure?" She can't possibly come.

HOSTESS:

Regrets from Perdita, Rosalind and Sylvia, who frankly do avow a picnic would have tempted them far more than our tea party. Saith Perdita: "I could have come, if it had been to gather flowers."



## A SHAKESPEAREAN FANTASY

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**OPHELIA:**

To gather flowers! Why, that is what I do!

**ANNE H.:**

Therein lieth her cure, poor soul. The flowers of paradise are not to her like those of earth, and she is sent back, ever and anon, to gather blossoms with the children in the fields. When they go home they do babble of the one who hath been with them, and none believe them.

**MIRANDA:**

'Twas thus when my dear father, Prospero, would raise his wand and conjure up the spirits of the earth and air. None saw them save himself.

**JULIET (Earnestly):**

The children see. Their eyes are pure, their loving hearts know love, are tender to its soft impress, before the hardfast mold of fashion fits them. Ah! love, love, love, 'tis the life of all created things!

Aye, the children see,  
And so do lovers in their ecstasy.

**NURSE:**

There you go, just as bad as on that Tuesday!—was it Tuesday?—no, 'twas the day after Sunday—'Twas Sunday that you met with Romeo. 'Twas all over by Thursday night. And driving me atween you two the whiles, like shuttle-cock and battle-door! 'Twas the same coming here! Hadn't set eyes on you for upward of three hundred year. "Come, Nurse," says you, "come, Nurse, there's a tea-party back there," says you, and me a setting peaceable over a posset with Dame Quickly—

**HOSTESS:**

Where was that?

**NURSE (Nods and winks):**

I'm not telling where it was.

**HOSTESS (To Juliet):**

But you—where have you been?

T H E   G R E A T   E X P E R I M E N T

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JULIET:

I have been with my love,  
So in my heav'n, all other heav'ns above!

HOSTESS:

Were there others in that place? Others like you, I  
mean?

JULIET:

Who've loved but one?  
Alas, dear lady, there were none!  
But I am told the other place, where  
Dwell those who had many, is—

CLEO.:

The lowest hell!

Exit.

LADY MACBETH (With apparent sanity):

No, not the lowest.  
That hath been the fate  
Of those who lived and died in hate.

Exit.

HOSTESS:

Do let us talk of something more cheerful. Dear Mrs. Shakespeare, tell us, if you know, what became of your husband's elves and fairies? Whither went Puck and Ariel?

ANNE H.:

Nowhither. They are children of the elements and bound to that of which they are composed—earth and air. Hark! didst hear that laugh? That was Puck. He is bringing the Merry Wives. I wonder where he found them!

Enter Merry Wives, laughing heartily.

MISTRESS FORD:

Well! well! 'tis not a joke, then, after all! There ye are!  
(She curtseys to Hostess, Anne H., and the company.  
Mrs. Page does the same).

## A SHAKESPEAREAN FANTASY

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MISTRESS PAGE:

This is a *specious* meeting, as Dame Quickly would say!

MIST. FORD:

Right glad am I that we were hither led!

MIST. PAGE:

'Twill not take long to tell you all we know!

MIST. FORD:

Wives may be merry—and yet honest, too!  
Both laugh.

HOSTESS:

What do you think of the Great Beyond?

MIST. FORD:

'Tis the Great Betwixt where we are!

MIST. PAGE:

We find it very cheerful!

MIST. FORD:

A plenty o' company—pleasant folk enow.

HOSTESS:

Do tell me—is Sir John Falstaff there?

Wives both laugh.

MIST. FORD:

Aye, marry is he!

MIST. PAGE:

And still writing letters! I have one with me.

MIST. FORD:

So have I!

MIST. PAGE:

Here 'tis. Nay, 'tis from—

MIST. FORD:

And mine from—

Both laugh. They look for other letters.

## T H E   G R E A T   E X P E R I M E N T

MIST. PAGE (Takes out letter—reads):

“Ask me no reason why I love you.”

HOSTESS:

That has a very familiar sound.

MIST. FORD:

Mine is its double. “For though love use reason for his  
precisian, he admits him not for his counsellor.

MIST. PAGE (Looking over Mistress Ford’s shoulder):

‘Tis the very same! “You are not young——.”

MIST. PAGE AND MIST. FORD (Together):

No more am I. Ha! ha! then there’s more sympathy.  
You love sack and so do I. Would you desire better  
sympathy? Let us suffice thee, Mistress Page” (Mis-  
tress Ford uses her own name) “at the least if the  
love of a soldier can suffice, that I love thee. I will  
not say, ‘pity me’—’tis not a soldierlike phrase, but  
I say ‘love me’.

By me,  
Thine own true knight,  
By day or night,  
Or any kind of light,  
With all his might,  
For thee to fight.

John Falstaff.”

Both laugh.

HOSTESS:

Hath he been doing this ever since?

MIST. PAGE (Bewildered):

Since when?

ANNE H.:

They know not the passing of time.

(To Wives.) Since the old days at Windsor.

MIST. PAGE AND MIST. FORD:

Aye, ever since.

HOSTESS:

I wonder he does not use a stencil, and run off a few  
thousand copies for distribution.

## A SHAKESPEAREAN FANTASY

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MIST. PAGE:

A what?

ANNE H.:

They have not kept up with modern changes, as have those of us who would ascend to greater heights.

MIST. FORD:

We burn daylight.

MIST. PAGE:

Aye, we must be gone.

HOSTESS:

Not till you've had a cup of tea. (To Anne H.) Evidently they know not of your wise physician. Can you not tell me who he is?

ANNE H.:

Have you not guessed? Who but he hath fathomed the human heart and all its longings, desperations, fears, temptations, terrors?

HOSTESS:

Not —

ONE AFTER ANOTHER:

Dr. Shakespeare! Who but he?

ANNE H.:

William always loved his mad folk, jesters, fools and all, and when he went across he chose that sort of work—for we must work who there abide. So hath he diagnosed each case and hath wrought out the remedy. That is why he did not come, but sent me in his stead. He was with Lear when I left. 'Tis a stubborn case. When reason is uprooted by the cruelty of child to parent, who shall replant it? Cordelia is ever with her father, too much absorbed to come hither. But the Doctor says—

OPHELIA:

Speak you of dear Dr. Shakespeare? When he doth draw near and let his eyes rest on me, gracious and tender, a coolness goeth through my brain—the fears

## T H E   G R E A T   E X P E R I M E N T

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that haunted me are vanished.

I've brought the flowers the children gathered with me  
in the fields to-day. Take, each of you (to the others)  
a flower, and lay it down before this counterpart of  
him, in token of our gratitude—and homage.

Majordomo removes bust of Shakespeare to front of stage,  
center.

CATH. PARR:

I'll take no part in such a rite!

CATH. HOWARD:

Nor I!

ANNE OF CLEVES:

Nor I! He made no mention of us four.

JANE SEYMOUR:

It was a slight!

Exeunt the four Queens.

Each of the remaining characters chooses a flower from  
Ophelia's basket and places it on the bust of Shakes-  
peare, reciting a verse in the following order:

CATHERINE OF ARAGON:

The violet I choose;  
'Tis purple's finer phase,  
Hint of the hues of those old royal days  
When I did walk a queen by kingly Henry's side.  
Not less my royalty has grown, not less my pride,  
But finer—moonrise after sunset,  
The glowing purple turned to violet.

ANNE BOLEYN:

The fragrant flowering columbine  
That blooms on the heights—it shall be mine;  
So did I bloom, paid with my death,  
But gave unto the world *Elizabeth*.

QUEEN GERTRUDE:

I choose the pinks, nor can I tell you why,  
Save that the flowers are pleasing to the eye,  
For I had ne'er the mind, profound, intense,  
That seeks to pry into the hidden sense,  
To search, to measure, to compare,  
It is enough for me that they are fair.

## A SHAKESPEAREAN FANTASY

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JULIET:

Poppies I choose, because they sealed mine eyes  
And opened them again, to mysteries.  
So sweet the dream, so bitter the return,  
It was not hard the lesson to relearn,  
And find the pathway to the unbarred gate,  
Where I did keep my tryst.  
My lover was not late.

NURSE:

Some be hot and some be cold,  
Some be bashful, some be bold,  
But there's none too young and none too old,  
Marry, give me the marigold.

MIRANDA:

Forget-me-not is mine. I well recall  
How the great waves did build a monstrous wall  
About our isle, wherein were bowers  
And gardens of bright-tinted flowers.  
And ever and anon the gentle Fay  
Would on an instrument of music play.  
Much did my father teach me then to understand,  
But love I learned from gracious Ferdinand.

VOLUMNIA:

These are the memories of youth,  
Age chooseth differently, in truth  
Less for the flowers than for the stem:  
Ambitions, purposes, we hold to them,  
And lay them, dried, ready to fall apart,  
In the safe, secret places of the heart:  
Lavender is mine.

PORcia:

I choose the vine;  
So did I climb and cling  
Round my uncrowned king;  
Mantle and chaplet made  
For him, the unafeard,  
Strong in his pride of race,  
Daring the populace.

## **T H E   G R E A T   E X P E R I M E N T**

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### **MRS. CAESAR:**

I choose the flower-de-luce,  
The flower of three, great Caesar's flower,  
For reasons that I will set forth.  
With Pompey and with Crassus hitherto at war,  
He formed the council of the three,  
The first triumvirate.  
Three times was Caesar wed: to Cinna's daughter first,  
Then to Pompeia, to Calphurnia last—  
The other two were but affairs of state—  
And thrice he put aside the crown  
Thrice offered.  
Thrice in my sleep did I cry out  
The night before the fatal Ides of March:  
“Help! ho! they murder Caesar.”  
Then, too, his greatest written work,  
The Commentarii, doth begin:  
“Omnis Gallia in partes tres divisa est.”

### **MISTRESS FORD:**

Not roses or lilies,  
Or pinks or sweet-willies,  
But daffy-down dillies,  
My token shall be.

### **MISTRESS PAGE:**

Roses, like laughter, endure but a day,  
But we sow them, so please you, along by the way,  
For everyone's sake, for everyone knows,  
There's nothing so sweet as a laugh, or a rose.

### **OPHELIA:**

I knew a verse once, 'twas a tender rhyme  
That went back to the very edge of time—  
When homesick Eve withdrew her gentle eyes  
From gazing on the closed gates of Paradise.  
Her sorrowing tears dropped down upon the dust  
And turned its ashes into flowers. They must  
Be thine, heartsease, heartsease—  
Kind friend, Ophelia offers these.

## A SHAKESPEAREAN FANTASY

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ANNE HATHAWAY:

For me the hazel, the divining rod,  
That finds the spring beneath the sod.  
It is for this most meet—  
To lay down at the Master's feet.

HOSTESS:

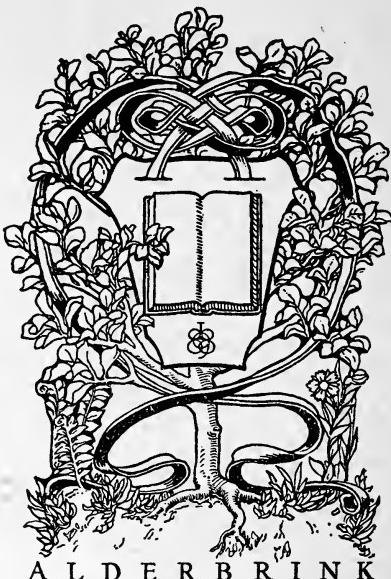
Daisies for me;  
Why, I can quickly say;  
I brought you all back  
To the *eye of day*.

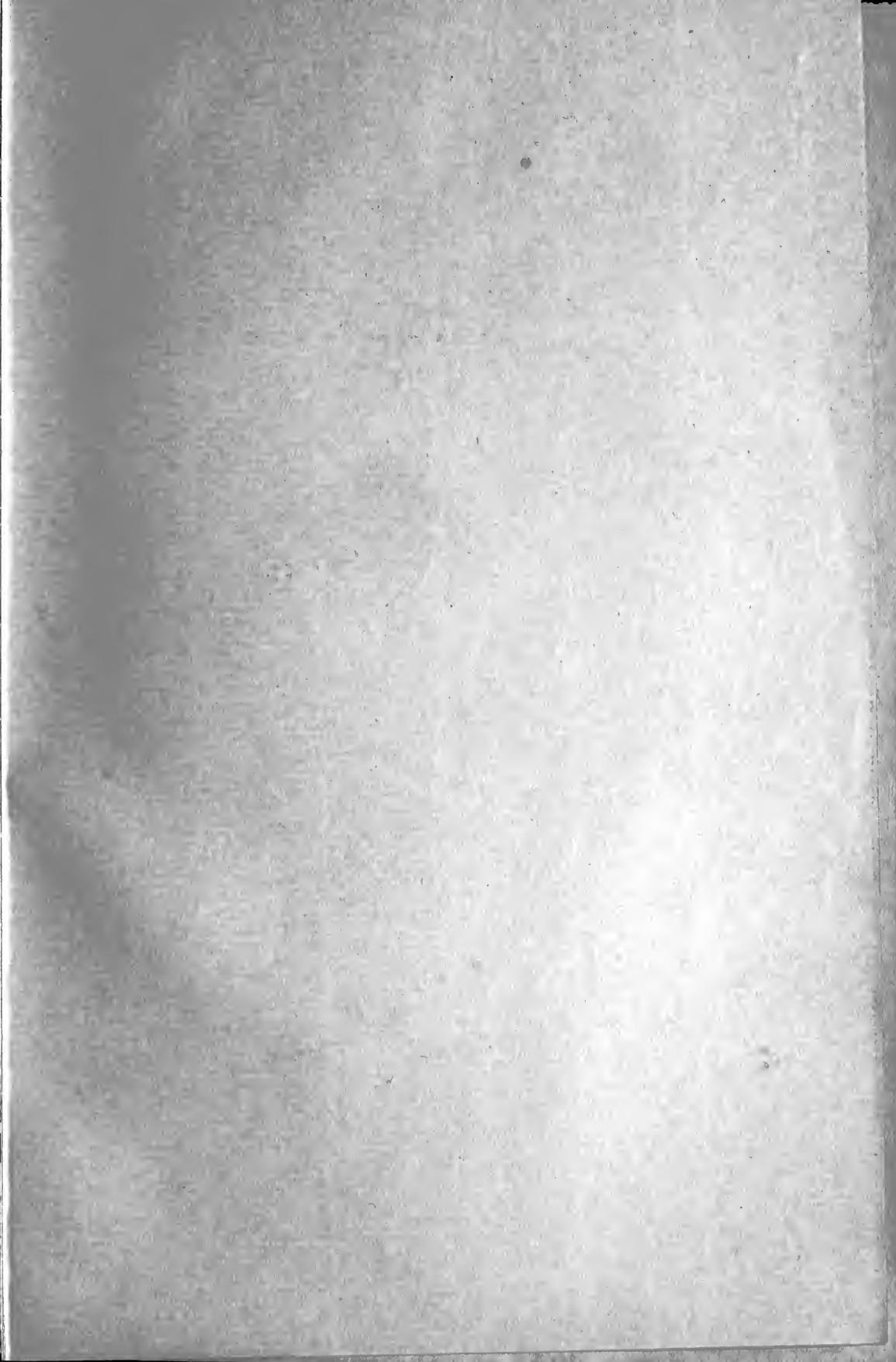
ANNE HATHAWAY (Takes Hostess by the hand):

William will be so *pleased!*

CURTAIN.

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